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CIA harms Pope probe — senator

From Chicago Tribune wires

NEW YORK—Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R., N.Y.) claims the Central Intelligence Agency is obstructing Italy's investigation of the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II.

D'Amato told a press conference Wednesday after his arrival from Rome that the CIA conduct was "very suspicious" and that it was obvious "the CIA would have liked the investigation dropped."

Asked if he was suggesting that CIA Director William Casey may be involved in a cover-up, D'Amato said, "Yes."

D'Amato accused the CIA of attempting to "cast doubt on the competence and integrity of Italian authorities."

D'Amato was in Rome for five days conducting what he called a one-man investigation into the 1981 wounding of the Pope. Officials in the U.S. Embassy there regarded his visit as a publicity stunt to influence Polish and Italian Catholic voters back home.

D'AMATO HAS BEEN saying that the Bulgarian government and the Soviet KGB secret police were behind the shooting by Mehmet Ali Agca.

D'Amato accused CIA officials of spreading "disinformation" to lend credence to theories that Agca was a madman acting on his own.

He said there were other factors he could not disclose, but that he would inform National Security Adviser William Clark.

D'Amato also said he was "shocked to learn from a high CIA official in Rome that not one agent has been assigned exclusively to the case."

An Italian spokesman in Washington said no assistance was requested from the CIA. "Why should we have assistance in this matter?" said Paolo Tralza, first secretary of the Italian Embassy.

THE REAGAN administration has taken the public position that the



Sen. Alfonse D'Amato

shooting is "an internal matter" for the Italians to handle.

"That's nonsense," D'Amato said. "We are talking about implications that go far beyond an internal affair, to the Bulgarians and the Soviets."

Last week, CIA officials in Washington told reporters that the Italian investigation so far had turned up no conclusive proof that the Soviet Union was behind the shooting. They said, though, that circumstantial evidence linked Agca to the Bulgarian secret police.

If a Soviet connection were proved, it would chill East-West relations and negotiations over arms control, trade and other matters.

D'Amato cited three examples of what he called CIA obstruction of the investigation.

HE SAID THAT unnamed CIA sources spread stories lending credence to the theory that Agca was insane and that the CIA suggested that Italian authorities had tainted Agca's testimony by improperly giving him information.

He also accused the CIA of stopping a key Senate Intelligence Committee aide from going with him to Rome by spreading information about the aide's interests in terrorist activities. He refused to identify the aide.

"There is no positive information coming forth from the CIA, only disinformation intended to cast doubt," D'Amato said.